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S E C R E T SAIGON 25233

EXDIS

1. I TOOK AMBASSADOR LODGE AND MR. KOMER TO CALL ON PRIME MINISTER KY ON 9 MAY. KY WAS IN AN EXPANSIVE MOOD. IN THE COURSE OF AN HOUR'S CANDID DISCUSSION WE COVERED A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT POINTS.

2. PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, WHEN I COMPLIMENTED THE PRIME MINISTER ON GENERAL VIEN'S ANNOUNCEMENT THE ARMED FORCES AS A GROUP WOULD NOT NOMINATE ANY MILITARY MAN, KY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS WAS THE ONLY CORRECT COURSE. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT BECAUSE OF HIS OWN CONVICTION OF THE NEED FOR A SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN SVN AND HIS BELIEF THAT HE COULD MOST EFFECTIVELY SERVE HIS COUNTRY

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GUIDING IT, HE INTENDS TO RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

3. HE THEN DESCRIBED A LONG AND FRANK TALK WITH GENERAL THIEU THAT MORNING. KY TOLD THIEU THAT HE INTENDED TO RUN, AND THEN ASKED THIEU FOR "UNITY OF THE MILITARY," KY SAID THAT GENERAL THIEU AGREED THAT THE ARMED FORCES SHOULD REMAIN UNITED. ACCORDING TO KY, THIEU DID NOT KNOW WHETHER HE WILL RETURN TO THE ARMY OR SIMPLY RETIRE. THIEU WAS A BIT CONCERNED ABOUT WHETHER "THE GENERALS" WOULD WORK WITH HIM IF HE RETURNED TO ACTIVE DUTY IN SOME CAPACITY. THIEU THOUGHT THAT THE GENERALS WERE "SUSPICIOUS" OF HIM. KY SAID HE ASSURED THIEU THAT THE GENERALS WOULD WORK LOYALLY WITH HIM SHOULD HE CHOOSE A RETURN TO A MILITARY CAREER, ADDING THAT THIEU WAS TOO YOUNG TO RETIRE. KY ENDED BY ASSURING ME AGAIN THAT THERE WOULD BE NO SPLIT AMONG THE MILITARY.

4. KY THEN DISCUSSED HIS OWN ELECTION CHANCES IN A VERY CONFIDENT TONE. HE NOTED THAT THE POLITICIANS AND INTELLECTUALS IN SAIGON

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TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF CIVILIAN CANDIDATES, BUT THEY WERE NOT REALLY KNOWN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WHERE MOST OF THE VOTERS

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WERE. KY PROUDLY CITED THE POLL WHICH INDICATED THAT 52 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE IN THE DELTA KNEW THAT HE WAS PRIME MINISTER. HE DISMISSED SEVERAL OF THE CIVILIAN CANDIDATES AS UNIMPORTANT. THEY WOULD TAKE THE 10 MILLION PIASTERS ALLOTED TO EACH CANDIDATE, SPEND 1 MILLION OF IT, AND POCKET THE REST. WHEN ASKED IF SUU AND HUONG WERE NOT MORE FORMIDABLE CANDIDATES, HE SAID THAT THEY DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE AGAINST HIM. SUU AND DAN WERE "FINISHED." SUU WAS MUCH TOO OLD AND COULDN'T MAKE UP HIS MIND. IF ELECTED, HE WOULD BECOME A FIGUREHEAD FOR OTHERS BEHIND HIM, AND THE RESULT WOULD BE ANOTHER COUP. HUONG WAS TOO SICK AND WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.

5. I POINTED OUT THAT FROM THE STANDPOINT OF POPULAR BACKING AND INTERNATIONAL OPINION, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE WINNING CANDIDATE RECEIVE A HIGH PROPORTION OF THE VOTE. A RUN-OFF WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO ASSURE SUCH A VOTE. KY DID NOT RESPOND. I THEN ASKED WHETHER THE ASSEMBLY HAD DECIDED ON A SPECIFIC MINIMUM PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE REQUIRED FOR ELECTION. HE OPINED THAT THE ASSEMBLY MIGHT SHORTLY DECIDE ON 35 PERCENT OR 37
PERCENT, "MY AGE" AS THE MINIMUM. HE SEEMED CLEARLY TO FEEL

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THAT HE WOULD GET A MORE SUBSTANTIAL VOTE THAN THIS, AND ASSURED ME THAT IN ANY CASE THIS WOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM.

6. NEXT I NOTED THAT STRONG CIVILIAN REPRESENTATION IN ANY SLATE WAS IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF GETTING A LARGE VOTE AND IMPRESSING WORLD OPINION. I ASKED IF HE HAD MADE ANY CHOICE OF RUNNING MATE? HE SAID NO, SINCE HE HAD JUST DECIDED TO RUN. HOWEVER, HE WAS ACTIVELY THINKING ABOUT THIS PROBLEM. HE MENTIONED THAT VO LONG TRIEU AND OTHER SOUTHERNERS AROUND HUONG HAD APPROACHED HIM TO TEAM UP WITH HUONG (IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THEIR MOST RECENT SUGGESTION WAS THAT KY RUN ON HUONG'S TICKET OR VICE VERSA). KY INDICATED HE HAD TOLD THEM HE WOULD ACCEPT HUONG AS VICE-PRESIDENT. HE SAID, HOWEVER, HUONG WOULDNT BE ABLE TO DO MUCH AS VICE PRESIDENT. HE COULD HAVE A BIG HOUSE IN SAIGON, BUT WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE MUCH TO RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT. KY DID NOT MENTION ANY OTHER POSSIBILI-

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TIES, THOUGH HE CLEARLY GOT MY IMPLICATION THAT INCLUDING ABLE CIVILIANS IN HIS SLATE WOULD BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO HIM.

7. AT THE OUTSET OF OUR CONVERSATION I ASKED THE PRIME MINISTER ABOUT THE SITUATION IN I CORPS. COMMENTING THAT HE HAD JUST BEEN THERE, HE PROFESSED CONFIDENCE THAT IT WAS UNDER CONTROL. HE

DESCRIBED HIS VISIT AT SOME LENGTH, ESPECIALLY HIS TRIP TO THE MARKETPLACE IN HUE. THIS LED HIM INTO DESCRIBING HIS VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE PEOPLE AND CONDUCTING A REAL SOCIAL REVOLUTION. THIS WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT TASK OF ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT. KY THEN SAID THAT HE EXPECTED TO VISIT QUANG NGAI SHORTLY. HE NOTED THAT ON THE ADVICE OF AN OLD AND VERY WISE CONFIDANT, HE WAS GOING TO SACK THE CIVILIAN PROVINCE CHIEF OF QUANG NGAI. THIS MAN HAD ALSO LIED ABOUT RD PROGRESS IN THE PROVINCE, AS GENERAL THANG HAD CONFIRMED.

8. I TOLD HIM OF OUR STRONG INTEREST IN THE REVAMPING OF THE ARVN TO SUPPORT PACIFICATION, AND ASKED HIM IF HE WAS SATISIFIED WITH THE PRESENT ARVN COMMANDERS IN THE FIELD. HE RESPONDED BY TICKING OFF HIS VIEWS ON MOST OF THEM. THE FOUR CORPS COMMANDERS WERE NOW GOOD MEN, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF GENERAL MANH WHO SEEMED RATHER WEAK BUT WAS OF COURSE NEW IN HIS JOB. THE DIVISION COMMANDERS IN IV CORPS WERE GOOD. IN III CORPS AROUND SAIGON HOWEVER THEY WERE MUCH WORSE. THE COMMANDER OF THE 18TH DIVISION WAS VERY YOUNG AND HAD NOT DONE TOO WELL. GENERAL TUAN OF THE 5TH DIVISION WAS POOR AND WAS

GOING TO BE CHANGED SOON. BESIDES, GENERAL TUAN WAS TOO INTERESTED IN HIS OWN PERSONAL AFFAIRS, AN OBVIOUS ALLUSION TO CORRUPTION. GENERAL CHINH OF THE 25TH WAS A VERY INTERESTING CASE WHICH KY DESCRIBED AT LENGTH. CLEARLY DID NOT THINK CHINH A VERY COMPETENT COMMANDER. THE TWO DIVISION COMMANDERS IN II CORPS WERE GOOD MEN. IN I CORPS GENERAL TRUONG OF THE 1ST DIVISION WAS OUTSTANDING. THE 2ND DIVISION COMMANDER WAS GOOD TOO. IN RESPONSE TO KOMER'S QUERY, HE SAID THAT GENERAL THI OF THE 9TH DIVISION WAS UNHAPPY BECAUSE HE HAD EXPECTED TO BECOME CORPS COMMANDER. BUT THI WAS COMING AROUND.

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9. KY THEN STRESSED LEADERSHIP OF THE ARVN AS THE MOST CRITICAL PROBLEM. HE AND GENERAL VIEN WOULD DO ALL THEY COULD TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP, ESPECIALLY AT THE IMPORTANT BATTALION AND REGIMENTAL LEVEL. THE COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF SCHOOL AT DALAT WAS NO GOOD, HENCE KY AND VIEN WERE DETERMINED TO IMPROVE IT. TOP NOTCH PROVINCE CHIEFS WERE ALSO ESSENTIAL, AND THERE WERE DEFICIENCIES HERE. KY WAS PLANNING A TWO-WEEK COURSE FOR ALL PROVINCE CHIEFS AT NHA TRANG. TOP OFFICIALS OF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BRIEF THEM ON WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE.

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10.

11. WHILE THE ABOVE SEEMED TO ME TO BE HIS MOST SIGNIFICANT COMMENTS, KY WENT ON AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT HIS LACK OF PERSONAL AMBITION AND WILLINGNESS TO RETURN TO A MILITARY CAREER. AT THE SAME TIME HE STRESSED HIS CONVICTION THAT ONLY HE COULD OFFER THE PEOPLE THE KIND OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION THAT VIETNAM SO BADLY NEEDED AT THIS POINT IN TIME. BUNKER
BT

NOTE: PASSED S/S-O, WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA, MAY 10, 7:15 A.M.

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